

**THERE IS NO EGG IN EGGPLANT,  
NO HAM IN HAMBURGER;  
NEITHER PINE OR APPLE IN PINEAPPLE!**

<http://www.ahajokes.com/eng002.html>

*by Chris Schellenberg*



If you have recently tried to learn a foreign language or traveled abroad, your awareness becomes stimulated by the challenge of functioning in a culture vastly different than your own. Even if you possessed the ability to speak the language; idioms, everyday expressions, and exceptions to grammatical rules probably led to a host of humorous exchanges. For burgeoning populations in not only urban but also sub-rural and rural communities, public libraries have become a destination for patrons seeking an informational and social center. There may be “no place like home”, but what if you are far from home or need to adjust to a new home? The encouragement and promotion of multiplicity and diversity can take many forms in public libraries.

The advancement of diversity is not a new issue for public libraries to address. Public libraries share a common mission to serve everyone in the community of which they are a part. To meet local needs and public issues, public libraries now include a wider range of materials and offer more services than ever.

The Vigo County Public Library (VCPL) has a long history of supporting, promoting, and even initiating community organizations and community efforts. In 1988, the VCPL's Community Services Librarian initiated efforts to develop and foster a Wabash Valley Literacy Coalition serving not only the county which the VCPL serves but the surrounding counties as well. The coalition is one of the oldest in Indiana and although membership has expanded in scope, the mission to work together in an “effort to raise literacy awareness in the community and to provide a network for literacy advocates” remains the same. Several years after the coalition was established, Vigo County Public Library assumed leadership of an English as a Second Language (ESL) program to provide one-to-one tutoring for the community's newest members. The VCPL's decision to accept this responsibility led to community partnerships, a noticeably more diverse attendance at VCPL events, (especially those with children), the satisfaction of knowing that staff are reaching out to all potential patrons, development of customized literacy services

and also – a lot of fun!

**Q: What happens to your body as you age?**

**A: When you get old, so do your bowels  
and you get intercontinental.**

[www.tech-sol.net/humor/true21.htm](http://www.tech-sol.net/humor/true21.htm)

If we, as native speakers, become confused using our own language, imagine the challenge non-English speakers face! Learning life skill English for health care, education, and finance is in itself a daunting task, but in everyday life this is made even more difficult since many jokes and TV shows rely on poor grammar, slang, idioms, and double entendres for humor. To assist ESL adult students in becoming more familiar with the English language, the Vigo County Public Library coordinates individual tutoring sessions, and plans and implements ESL group events that focus on specific literacy skills. The various ESL programs encourage strong relationships with other ESL community members and Interlink Language Center students.

The VCPL partners with a variety of community organizations to provide the cultural and social relationships non-English speakers crave. These events have included:

- “A Family Literacy Night with ESL Bingo” is just one of four special programs sponsored by a local Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society at Indiana State University. Fifty-seven people attended with a dozen children. Word bingo games, complete with books as prizes were part of a Phi Kappa Phi literacy grant involving members who desired to become actively involved in community efforts to promote literacy and diversity.
- A series of “English Nights” with a guest speaker and discussion groups on particular topics, is open to all ESL learners: those matched with a tutor, those waiting for placement, their families, ESL community members and INTERLINK Language School students. Recent topics have included:
  - Understanding Prescriptions
  - Safe Food and You

- Identity Theft
- Fire Safety and Awareness
- Current events; Newspaper article discussion

**...the masculine pronouns are he, his and him, but imagine the feminine, she, shis and shim.**

<http://www.corsinet.com/braincandy/hlanguage.html>

- ESL Women's Conversation Group, facilitated by an Excel of Terre Haute, Inc. community volunteer, meets weekly and has proved to be very successful. Since some cultures are more comfortable with same-sex interactions, it was decided to limit membership in this group to women. Begun originally as a way to serve students waiting for a tutor, the approximately 20 women now discuss anything from their thoughts to their wedding dresses. The group and facilitators have become friends, extending what began as a VCPL "class" into area trips to a karaoke restaurant, an apple orchard, and the Clabber Girl Museum. Vigo County Public Library and Excel of Terre Haute, Inc. have become partners in this and other ESL events. Excel of Terre Haute, a not-for-profit organization that hosts seminars and workshops intended to foster a more inclusive community, provided the facilitator for this group and also funded a variety of ESL programs for a year.
- Indiana State University's Communication Department sponsored an oral narrative collaboration made possible through a *Liberal Learning in Action Grant*. The project, *Cross-Cultural Narratives: Exploring the Lived Experiences of the Members of Cross-Cultural Communities in Terre Haute, IN*, involved ISU students in collecting, transcribing and responding to the oral narratives of adult ESL students in the VCPL Program.

The Lifelong Learning Center (LLC) manager and ISU students were required to complete an on-line distance learning training session, "Conducting the Information Interview." This included modules which corresponded with the seven stages of an information interview. Ethical principles associated with information interviewing are a particular concern when interviewing those with low English language literacy. This narrative project highlighted diversity in Terre Haute's community, gave ISU students training on cultural sensitivity and validated the ESL students' immigration and American experience stories.

- Indiana State University Department of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics invites the LLC manager annually to teach a class on volunteer-based community ESL programs.

- INTERLINK Language Center classes tour VCPL and attend English Nights. Altrusa International of Terre Haute sponsors social gatherings in members' homes.

**English was invented by people, not computers  
And it reflects the creativity of the human race  
(Which of course isn't a race at all)**

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Language is constantly changing. Think about the use of "whatever" or "duh." And, like language, our communities change too. If we are to take advantage of all the creativity and human resources available in our communities, libraries with their mission to serve everyone in the community, are a natural place to start. The Vigo County Public Library has served as a community catalyst promoting community inclusion in politics, education and employment. In 2004 the local United Way of the Wabash Valley embarked on a community wide needs assessment. As a result of this study the United Way asked the VCPL's assistance in forming a Racial and Ethnic Diversity Implementation Team to work toward racial and ethnic inclusion in the Wabash Valley. The initiative includes partnerships with the Terre Haute Human Relations Commission, the local NAACP chapter, ISU's Affirmative Action office, the YWCA, and the Sisters of Providence. Partially funded by the United Way, the group's focus is on racial inclusion in three areas: politics, employment and education. Their Issue Statement is "Racial or ethnic discrimination limits opportunities and the quality of life of all people in the Wabash Valley."

In all three areas, the team began by compiling information and then moved into active sharing and community discussion of important issues. Most recently the Racial and Ethnic Diversity Implementation Team initiated a series of workshops featuring a



*Sang Bok (left) and Zihye (right) pose in traditional Korean wedding dresses for the ESL Women's Conversation Group.*

prominent Indianapolis attorney focusing on legal obligations and consequences of neglecting diversity workplace issues. The workshops were aimed at local human resource professionals and business owners. The Wabash Valley Human Resource Association served as co-sponsor of the workshops. The team also hosted a series of community meetings to discuss and encourage minority inclusion in the community's political system. Local speakers included mentors from the county school board and the city and county councils. Lists were distributed of vacancies on local boards and commissions and follow-up sessions were planned to determine what impact the meetings provided to individuals hoping to serve on appointed and elected boards and commissions. The eventual outcome is to support these same individuals as they hopefully run for political office. Being a part of the "system" is an important aspect of not only community service but "being included" in the affairs of the community. As the Racial and Ethnic Diversity Implementation Team's Possibility Statement suggests – "Efforts to eliminate racial or ethnic discrimination will help create a community using all of its citizen talent bank for the overall growth and success of the Wabash Valley." Assuming the leadership role for the promotion of community inclusion is an important part of the overall mission of the Vigo County Public Library to promote and foster the welfare of the entire community.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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*Kaleena Dale (center back), Phi Kappa Phi member, facilitated the discussion of the "Easy English News" newspaper at the Cultural Literacy event with a group of ESL students.*